We claim:

1. A method for developing a core set of messages for an element management system for a telecommunications network, comprising the steps of

reviewing telecommunications network management functions for each of a plurality of telecommunications network elements;

selecting the basic telecommunications network management functions; and

creating an element-independent telecommunications network management message, in a common telecommunications management message protocol, for each selected telecommunications management function.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein more than one of the plurality of telecommunications network elements are manufactured by different manufacturers.

3. The method according to claim 1, wherein more than one of the plurality of telecommunications network elements are different equipment types.

4. An element management system for a telecommunications network, comprising:

means for receiving, from a software application, a downstream element-independent network management message selected from a core set of downstream element-independent network management messages, for transmission to a telecommunications network element;

means for mapping the downstream element-independent network management message into a downstream element-dependent network management message, and into an element-dependent protocol, for the telecommunications network element; and

means for transmitting the downstream element-dependent network management message to the telecommunications network element.

5. An element management system according to claim 4, wherein the core set of downstream element-independent network management messages results from the method of claim 1.

6. An element management system according to claim 4, wherein the core set of downstream element-independent network management messages comprises a reduced number of downstream network management messages supporting basic telecommunications network management functionality.

7. An element management system for a telecommunications network, comprising:

means for receiving an upstream element-dependent network management message from a telecommunications network element;

means for mapping the upstream element-dependent network management message into a upstream element-independent network management message selected from a core set of upstream element-independent network management messages, and into a common element-independent message protocol; and

means for transmitting the upstream element-independent network management message to a software application.

8. An element management system according to claim 7, wherein the core set of upstream element-independent network management messages results from the method of claim 1.

9. An element management system according to claim 7, wherein the core set of upstream element-independent network management messages comprises a reduced number of upstream network management messages supporting basic telecommunications network management functionality.

10. An element management system for a telecommunications network, comprising:

means for receiving an unsolicited element-dependent network management message from a telecommunications network element;

means for mapping the unsolicited element-dependent network management message into an element-independent network management message identifying the telecommunications network element and the nature and priority of the unsolicited element-dependent network management message; and

means for transmitting the element-independent network management message to a software application.